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171335Z Mar 05

UNCLAS DJIBOUTI 000278

SIPDIS

STATE FOR G/IWI (L. KHADIAGALA), AF/RSA, DRL, AND AF/E

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: CHILD MARRIAGE_JIBOUTI

Ref: State 36341

1. (U) Summary: Underage marriage exists in Djibouti on a small scale. Child marriage is more prevalent among Arabs, Afars and people living in rural areas. However, underage marriage is decreasing as a result of government policies and assistance from the international community. End of summary.

2. (U) Response to Part A: Officials from the Ministry of Justice indicated that the legal age for marriage in Djibouti is eighteen, which corresponds to the legal age for majority. The legal age of marriage is the same for boys and girls. There is no lower legal age of marriage with parental consent.

3. (U) Response to Part B: No studies or statistics are available in Djibouti to assess the extent of underage marriage. However, the Government, civil society and NGOs confirmed that underage marriage exists in Djibouti but does not constitute a significant problem. Studies completed in 2004 by the Ministry of Health and the Office of Statistics, in collaboration with the Arab Program on Family Health, show that the average age of marriage in Djibouti is high; 30.7 years of age for males and 28 years of age for females. Officials from the Ministry of the Promotion of Women indicated that underage marriage is more prevalent in certain groups. For instance, some Arab girls in Djibouti get married as young as age 13 in arranged marriages with older men. The true age of the girl is not always revealed to government officials conducting the marriage ceremony. Men from Afar tribes of the Southern region of Djibouti are known for marrying underage girls. Underage marriage is in general more common in rural areas than in cities. Other instances of underage marriage take place in cases of pregnancy of a minor after a rape or sexual intercourse with mutual consent. The male, also a minor in most cases, is forced by tribal leaders to marry the girl to save her honor. Underage marriage affects the child who is not prepared or mature enough to face life's difficulties. It also results in violence when a young girl gets married to an older man who does not hesitate to beat the child.

4. (U) Response to Part C: The Ministry of Education, assisted by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and other international organizations, is currently implementing a project aimed at increasing the enrollment of girls in school and keeping those already enrolled in school. Underage girls enrolled in school are unlikely to be forced into marriage by their parents. Also, the Embassy's Democracy and Human Rights Fund (DHRF) occasionally funds projects on children's rights or women's rights. The Embassy is currently funding a project on preventing violence against women throughout the country. Finally, the Ministry for the Promotion of Women and women's associations all over the country have become more confident in voicing their concerns about women's and girls' rights, including the right of a woman to decide when and who to marry.

5. (SBU) Comment: The current government of Djibouti is committed to improving its women's rights record. Women, by law, are allocated 10 percent of the seats in the National Assembly. Women currently constitute 45 percent of registered voters in Djibouti. End Comment.

RAGSDALE